

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 01353 252148Z
ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS LONDON 01353

E. O. NA
TAGS: UK MPOL
SUBJECT: INCREASED UK DEFENSE SPENDING

REF: LONDON 0574

1. AS BOTH MULLEY AND GILBERT PREDICTED TO US, THE GOVERNMENT CAME UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM ITS OWN LEFT-WING DURING QUESTION IN COMMONS YESTERDAY WHEN MULLEY TOLD THE HOUSE OF THE PLANNED INCREASES IN DEFENSE SPENDING. NOR WAS THE GOVERNMENT EXEMPT FROM ATTACKS BY THE CONSERVATIVES WHO JEERED AT MULLEY WHEN HE DEFENDED THE THREE PERCENT ANNUAL INCREASE (PLANNED FOR 79/80 TO 80/81) AGAINST THE BITTER VENDETTA OF LEFT-WING BACKBENCHERS. MULLEY, FOR PARTY POLITICAL REASONS, OBVIOUSLY FELT OBLIGED NOT TO OVERSTRESS THE INCREASE, DESCRIBING THE DEFENSE BUDGET AS THE GOVERNMENT'S "LOWEST IN REAL TERMS." MULLEY SAID THAT OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS DEFENSE SPENDING IN REAL TERMS HAS FALLEN BY FOUR PERCENT WHILE CIVIL PROGRAMS HAVE INCREASED BY SIX POINT FIVE PERCENT. HE EXPLAINED
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PAGE 02 LONDON 01353 252148Z

THAT THE DEFENSE ESTIMATES, DUE TO BE PRESENTED WHEN THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER IS DEBATED NEXT MONTH, WILL REPRESENT ABOUT FOUR POINT SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF ESTIMATED GDP (AT MARKET PRICES) COMPARED TO THE FIVE PERCENT IN LAST YEAR'S DEFENSE ESTIMATES.

2. TAKING A FIRM LINE WITH CRITICS, MULLEY ASSERTED

THAT NOW THE UK'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS WERE IMPROVING
"IT IS RIGHT THAT WE SHOULD PLAN TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE
INCREASE IN NATO DEFENSE EFFORTS MADE NECESSARY BY
THE MARKED AND CONTINUING GROWTH OF WARSAW PACT
MILITARY CAPABILITIES."

3. COMMENT: THESE LEFT-WING ATTACKS UNDOUBTEDLY ARE
A FORETASTE OF THE TROUBLE THE GOVERNMENT CAN EXPECT
WHEN THE DEFENSE ESTIMATES ARE DEBATED NEXT MONTH.
ALREADY A NUMBER OF LEFT-WINGERS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR
THEY INTEND TO VOTE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THIS IS
NOT UNUSUAL AND IT WOULD BE SURPRISING IF MORE
DAMAGE THAN JUST EMBARRASSMENT COMES FROM THIS
INTERNAL PARTY FRACAS. CERTAINLY, THE GOVERNMENT
CAN RELY ON CONSERVATIVE VOTES TO HELP IT CARRY THE
DEFENSE ESTIMATES TO A MAJORITY VOTE.

BREWSTER

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